EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Terms of Reference

Expert contributions to the JRC's project on Challenges and Opportunities for the Future of Democracy

The present document defines the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the call for Expression of Interest in being part of a pool of experts contributing to the Joint Research Centre's (JRC) research work[1]. The Call is for the provision of expert advice and contribution in designing and subsequently executing a state-of-the-art scientific literature review and analysis for a JRC project on 'Challenges and Opportunities for the Future of Democracy' (COFD) in the European Union (EU). The work will generate a set of 'Technical Notes' on a range of pre-selected topics (see below). It will do so building on the work that took place in the first phase of the project (scoping phase), carried out between December 2024 and June 2024 to scope areas of focus of future work. The subject of this Call is focused on some of the areas identified in the scoping phase.

1. Context

The European Commission's science and knowledge service, the JRC, a provider of world-class science for policy, aims to provide independent knowledge and science, supporting EU policies to positively impact society. The use of science, besides supporting the design of more effective policies, supports democracy by enabling informed democratic debate about the facts underpinning the proposed policies. The JRC has been working on different approaches to enable a more optimised use of science in policymaking. More specifically, the work carried out by the JRC includes conducting work on understanding the drivers that influence political decision-making[1], building capacity of researchers and policymaker[2], and building institutional capacity for evidence-informed policymaking in the EU Members States[3]. The JRC is also working to implement participatory and deliberative practices in science and policy[4], recognizing that, besides expert knowledge, other types of knowledge (e.g. experiential, embodied, indigenous and local) are needed to address citizens' concerns and needs, and ultimately liaise with complex governance issues.

[1] https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/evidence-informed-policy-making/topic/enlightenment-20_en
[2] https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/evidence-informed-policy-making/topic/smart4policy-check-your-competences_en
[3] https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/projects-activities/introducing-multi-country-technical-support-project-building-capacity-evidence_en
[4] https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/participatory-democracy/about_en

The political decision-making in the EU is founded on the democratic values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, inclusivity, representativeness, political deliberations, voting via elections, political freedom, and access to information. Having resilient and strengthened democratic systems in place to support and provide the space for a robust, inclusive and holistic political decision-making will be fundamental to face many of the complex challenges and threats lying ahead of our society now and in the future.

In the last years, concerns about a democratic backsliding, have emerged in the EU and in its Member States. But other threats to democracy have also become more apparent and insidious, illustrated by measurements of several issues, including long-term trends of declining electoral participation, increased alienation from politics, increased polarization[5], declining trust in political institutions and politicians as well as in democracy[6].

Many issues seem to be stemming from, and contributing to, a disenchantment with democracy. Socio-economic issues, inequalities, as well as issues associated with the quality of information shared across societies through digitalization, are some of the issues considered having an impact as pointed by the Strategic Foresight report 2023[7]. In this respect, reinvigorating EU democracy and identifying potential ways to further improve it, grow its resilience, and deepen its roots will be of fundamental importance to the EU.

The 'Challenges and Opportunities for the Future of Democracy' project (COFD) (benefiting from, and building on, existing JRC studies[8] and Horizon Europe projects[9]) aims to explore and shed light on key issues that could strengthen and innovate our current democratic systems to face best future trends and critical challenges, to anticipate and respond to them, and, in doing so, to increase trust in democracy and governing institutions.

2. Objectives and Scope

The project will seek to explore the development of future processes that will contribute to strengthening

[5] McCoy J, Somer M (2019). Toward a theory of pernicious polarization and how it harms democracies: comparative evidence and possible remedies. Ann Am Acad Political Soc Sci 681(1):234–271
[6] Past, present and future of democracy - Publications Office of the EU (europa.eu) 2019
[7] https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-07/SFR-23_en.pdf
[8] Such as the Future of Government 2030+, where foresight and speculative design were used to explore innovative approaches to democracy through engagement with citizens and other stakeholders across Europe.
[9] Such as Horizon Europe and Horizon 2020 projects and Calls including the cluster of projects on trust in governance (PERITIA, TIGRE, ENTRUST), the cluster on the **future of civic participation** (DUST, ORBIS, INCITE-DEM), the future of liberal democracy in Europe (RED-SPINEL, AUTHLIB, RECLAIM). The JRC project should forge links with the Nets4Dem "**Network of networks for democracy**" bringing together practitioners and researchers in the field of democracy, civic deliberation, participation and citizenship education, and whose role is to bring together the threads of research in democratic innovation, make it accessible, and issue recommendations to policymakers.

democracy and build resilience to future threats. Considering the complexity and the broadness of the topic, the project has started with a scoping phase (first phase) that was intended to direct JRC's future work (the subject of this Call) by shaping its objectives, scope and methodological approach. The scoping phase, now concluded, aimed to identify and explore critical challenges, emerging trends and drivers that could impact and influence the future of democracy. Following the scoping phase and its results, the project will now enter in its second phase, which aims to provide a deeper analysis of three of the topics identified in the first phase. The topics identified focus on the following questions:

- **Topic 1:** Citizen's support for and engagement in Democracy combined with issues of political equality and equal participation (i.e. research to better understand attitudes to democracy now and in the future, on educational programmes, on new interfaces with citizens (e.g. youth) including through democratic innovations (e.g. to raise political awareness and communication about democracy and EU)).

- **Topic 2:** Supporting democratic quality and the future of democratic institutions (i.e. research on supporting indicators on the state of democracy including on resilience of democratic institutions, including at local and regional level).

- **Topic 3:** Impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on how democracy will function (i.e. research on the use of AI on democratic practice, ideas, and potentially even structures considering its potential to the service of democracy as well as its misuses).

The ToR described in this document constitute the basis of the application for experts to participate in the second phase of the COFD project. This ToR define the context, roles, guidelines and assessment criteria for selecting experts. With support from JRC staff, the selected experts will be responsible collectively for: conducting state-of-the-art literature reviews and analyses of the topics indicated above. Each expert (see detail below) will be responsible for contributing to, or leading on, the creation of a detailed note on one of the relevant topics. For each topic of interest, the pool of experts working on it will need to:

- Develop, and obtain buy-in from key staff in the JRC of, a proposed structure and content (storyboard) of the final document, so that the subsequent generation of the document can commence on solid footing;
- Identify and rationalise key sources of information on the topic, so as to build a state-of-the-art literature review and an analysis based on solid scientific evidence and suitably underpinned expert judgment;

- Discuss and analyse key points, so as to strengthen the interpretation of the work;
- Participate in the parallel COFD project foresight strand on the relevant topic of interest;
- Identify key conclusions from the analysis and from the foresight exercise;
- Propose a set of policy options to deal with the topics of interest, based on the points above.

Each expert will be expected to work collaboratively and effectively with the other selected experts and with the JRC staff appointed to steer the objectives, scope and methodological approach to be used in the work.

Key components of the work will include four mandatory workshops (one in presence, and the other three to take place online through MS Teams), and the design, planning and execution of desk-based research activities preceding and following such workshops (see timeline in section below). The workshops are expected to feature:

- An initial, two and half days workshop designed to discuss collectively the aims of the work and provide key prospective inputs into its execution. This workshop is expected to feature a 'plenary' session in which all groups of experts will discuss overall project context, predecessor work, aims and scope together with members of the JRC and subsequent 'topic' sessions in which the experts will work within the group to discuss the specific Technical Note assigned to them. A key aspect of the work will entail the Lead Author and Contributing Authors of each topic to discuss and agree on an initial structure (storyboard) for their respective Technical Note. The workshop will take place in presence in Brussels.
- For each of the topics separately, a half-day session (online) to prepare the foresight workshop on the topic by identifying the key drivers for the challenge and their historical development, and defining key concepts for the workshop.
- For each of the topics separately, a second half-day workshop (online) designed to discuss a more advanced draft of the storyboard for each of the selected topic(s) and assign responsibilities with respect to the work given to the different 'Contributors' (defined below) with respect to drafting the final deliverable for each of the topics.
- For each of the topics separately, a third full day workshop (online) designed to discuss and refine the outcomes of the work within the project team and with the JRC, based on the final deliverable that will have been assembled together by the Lead Author considering the contributions of the Contributing Authors.

3. Fields of expertise

Given the scope and multidisciplinary nature of the questions at play, it is important to have a

comprehensive approach to the study. Therefore, a wide variety of expertise is required. The European Commission's JRC has substantial experience in working collaboratively with such multidisciplinary groups, so will facilitate interactions of experts working in different fields.

The following list provides an indication of the type of expertise that will be sought by the JRC to build the team of experts responsible for carrying out the work. The list does not intend to constrain or limit the nature of the expertise that might be needed or desirable to deliver the work, so should only be considered as a way for the JRC to help communicating to prospective experts their perceived needs. We would be delighted to receive applications from:

- Political scientists (public administration, institutionalism, political theory, comparative politics, democratic innovation),
- Historians,
- Political Economists,
- Legal scholars,
- Sociologists,
- Anthropologists,
- Philosophers,
- International Relations scholars,
- Futures studies/foresight scholars,
- Deliberative democracy scholars and/o practitioners,
- Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholars.
- Scholars working on quantitative analysis (e.g. indicators) of Democracy

4. Final deliverable

The key deliverables of the second phase of the project (the subject of this ToR) will be a detailed Technical Note (target length 30-50 pages, without references and annexes) for each of the three topics pre-selected. The technical notes will summarise the results of the work carried out, including background information, key analysis and discussion points, sources of information, and based on those, conclusions and suggestions for policy options.

5. Roles and responsibilities

Preparatory work and content delivery of the each of the technical notes, including preparation of the final deliverable for each of them, will be a responsibility of selected experts, split between a Lead and Contributing Authors. Among the selected experts, a Lead Author will be selected for the delivery of a

Technical Note (one for each topic). For each topic, each Lead Author will be supported by four Contributing Authors. To cover the project needs (three topics) a total pool of three Lead Authors supported by twelve Contributing Authors will be selected.

Lead and Contributing Authors will be selected based on expertise, suggested approach, motivation, availability to perform key duties within the timeframe indicated and track-record of working collaboratively on relevant projects. The Lead Authors are expected to ensure that the final deliverable (Technical Note) generated during the project is the result of a shared and consolidated view of all the relevant Contributing Authors through an effective communication style (e.g. balanced document with appropriate level of detail), rather than presenting a collation of potentially unstructured views in different styles.

Experts will be selected for their expertise and ability to ensure the following:

Lead author (3 experts, 22 person days each)

- With support from the JRC, the design, planning and execution of an effective approach to communicating the project needs, and actions required to deliver it, between Lead Author, Contributing Authors and the JRC, so as to deliver the project objectives to the time and quality required.
- Substantial individual contribution to the technical content of the main deliverable (Technical Note) covering one of the selected topic among the three identified in this document.
- Technical coordination of the work of all the Contributing Authors, delivered through leading on the generation and progressive refinement of the storyboarding of the final deliverable at the onset of the work (structure, content, ownership of specific sections).
- Technical integration of the work of the Contributing Authors, to ensure that the various contributions to the technical note are brought together in an effective, systematic and consistent way.
- High quality of the final deliverable. To this effect, the final deliverable is expected to be presented with a 'single voice', i.e. with an effective and uniform communication style.
- Attendance to the four above mentioned workshops, including required preparation. Attendance to the first workshop **in presence in Brussels** for two and half days is required.
- In addition, lead authors will be invited to attend a relevant full-day foresight workshop in presence in Brussels together with participants from academia and EU institutions and civil society organisations.

Contributing Authors (12 experts, 17 person days per expert)

- Effective communication with the Lead Author and the JRC on relevant matters and topics whenever necessary through an agreed calendar.
- The provision of their assigned/agreed technical duties (e.g. text for specific sections of the storyboard, work on the different versions of the document including answering comments, and contribution to the final report deliverable) to the Lead Author on time (through agreed dates which are to be aligned with the timeline of the project phase) and with high quality.
- The timely interaction with the JRC with respect to the planning and execution of the study, including participation on key meetings, requests of information to monitor project progress and/or possible resolution of technical issues such as differences in expert opinion.
- Support the work of the Lead Author in reviewing and preparing the final deliverable (including organization of references and bibliographic list).
- Attendance to the four above-mentioned workshops, including required preparation. Attendance to the first workshop **in presence** in Brussels for two days and half is required.

6. Application Procedure

In order to have their expression of interest considered, applicants need to submit the following:

- Identification, affiliation, field of expertise (please consider section 3) and CV.
- An indication of whether you would be interested to be a Lead or a Contributing Author (based on the duties define above).
- An indication of your preferred rank of the three topics identified in section 2 of this document based on your preference in contributing to them and your proficiency level in each of them. Please do so through the following scheme: E= expert, K = knowledgeable, N = not proficient.
- A rationale for your interest in either role, and on the ranking of the topics, based on your academic interests, experience and availability (max. 800 characters).
- **Core skills and expertise**, including experience and track record of carrying out similar duties, documented through the description of experience in working together with other experts in an open, collaborative and effective manner in similar studies (max. 2,000 characters).
- **Motivation and Availability**, including alignment with research interest and availability to carry out suggested duties (as Lead or Contributing Author) within the timescales included in this document (max. 2,000 characters). Note that the timeline for the execution of the first part of the work, requiring attendance to an in-person workshop in Brussels and the generation and agreement with JRC of a storyboard for each relevant technical note, is compressed; this part of the work requires reasonably good availability through the period of September to first week of November.

- **Abstract** (max. 2,000 characters), considering the topic(s) of preference and level of proficiency, briefly outline the scientific contribution you could make to this project in view of its aims, objectives and your expertise. This should include highlighting key technical considerations on the proposed objectives, scope, as well as indicating the key overall issues that should be considered in the work. Relevant considerations could include key factors that should be taken into account in the analysis, and which of these the author would propose to develop further. Where possible, applicants should provide examples of relevant references.

To submit your application[10], please use this link to the dedicated EU survey form. Only applications submitted to the dedicated EU survey will be considered.

The call is launched on Tuesday 9th July 2024 and will be open to applicants **until 1st September 2024 (extended deadline)**.

7. Selection procedure

Evaluation Committee composition: an evaluation committee will be composed by JRC staff specifically appointed for this call.

For the Assessment Criteria please consider the information on the Application Procedure in section 6.

Assessment criteria	Authors
Abstract	40%
Skills and Expertise	30%
Motivation and Availability	30%

8. Registration to the Participant Portal

Upon confirmed selection, **experts will be required to enter their details into the European Commission's database of independent experts within 5 days (max)**.

It is imperative that the experts selected by the Evaluation Committee to provide the JRC with the necessary expertise, as described in these ToR, register themselves in the Commission's database of independent experts. Only once the registration is complete, the JRC will be able to select them and

[10] By responding to this call, you accept that we process the data you insert for the sole purposes of the selection procedure of suitable experts to carry out the work described in Section 7 of these Terms of Reference. For more info on the purpose and conditions of the processing operations of personal data by the Commission, please see the Data Protection Register (for targeted consultations). Please click here for the privacy statement.

prepare an ad-hoc expert contract.

Please note that independently of this call for expression, experts can register themselves in the Commission's database of independent experts at any time. **We strongly recommend that all applicants do this already when submitting their application. This will make the process faster and more efficient.** More information on how to register can be found in the Expert Registration Portal here.

For the "step by step" to register:

Here's the 'How to": https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/funding-tenders-opportunities/display/IT/Creating+a+Profile+as+an+Expert+or+an+Applicant [webgate.ec.europa.eu]

Important note: you may find many answers to your questions in the FAQ for experts [ec.europa.eu].

9. Provisional timing in 2024/2025

September 2024 – The call closes at 23:59 (CET) on 1st September 2024. The Evaluation Committee will meet and inform all applicants of their decisions by 11th September.

September-October 2024 – Selected experts will have to create an expert profile by Wednesday 18th September 2024 (at the latest). The contracting will start after the experts have been registered. The weeks following registration will be required to organise expert contracts.

October 2024 – Work will start with an online kick-off meeting.

October-November 2024 – Selected experts will participate in the first workshop, a two and half days workshop designed to discuss collectively the aims of the study and provide key prospective and inputs into its execution. A key aspect of the work will entail the Lead Author and Contributing Authors of each topic discussing and agreeing on an initial structure for the technical note (storyboard). The workshop is to take place in presence in Brussels.

October-December 2024 – Selected experts to present an initial, work-in-progress refined document structure (storyboard) of the technical note for each topic. The storyboard should contain initial text to describe the content of different sections, so as to enable collective discussion and agreement of style, content of sub-sections, level of detail, etc. The session will also be used to assign responsibilities with respect to the work of different Contributing Authors with respect to the drafting and refinement of the

final deliverable.

Four online half-day session to prepare the foresight exercises on the topics will be organized.

A first full-day foresight workshop in presence (in Brussels) will be organized on the first topic (lead author to participate only).

January 2025 – March 2025 – Three other full-day foresight workshops in presence will be organized on the other topic (lead authors to participate only).

February-March 2025 - A second half-day workshop designed to discuss an early, work-in-progress, draft of the final deliverable that will have been prepared by the Lead author and Contributing Authors. The workshop will be designed to monitor progress and, through technical and programmatic discussion, agree actions to progress successfully towards project completion.

March-April 2025 – A third full day workshop designed to discuss and refine the outcomes of the study within the project team and with the JRC, based on the draft technical notes that will have been assembled together by the Lead Authors with inputs from Contributing Authors.

May-June 2025 – Experts work to produce the final draft of their assigned final deliverable (Technical Note), issued to the JRC for internal comment (i.e. internal review).

June-July 2025 – JRC to review the three Technical Notes generated by the different expert groups and issue comments to the expert groups.

July-October 2025 – Experts to deliver the three final deliverable addressing review comments from the JRC.

10. Enquiries

For any questions on the call, please use the following email address: JRC-ENLIGHTENMENT2@ec.europa.eu

Please do not submit your application to this email address as it will not be considered. **Please use the link to the dedicated EU Survey Form**, here.